

# Costello + Panza = Costanza: Paradigmatic Pairs in *Don Quixote* and American Popular Culture

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**Abstract:** There exist numerous representations that share significant affinities and continuities with *Don Quixote*'s poetics of comic fiction. Such artistic expressions, though often transformed into the language of a different medium as in the films of Abbott and Costello and the television sitcom *Seinfeld*, are the latest manifestations of a paradigm that has the characters of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza at its center.

**Keywords:** Abbott and Costello, paradigm, Don Quixote, *Seinfeld*, vaudeville

In addition to the many adaptations and translations of Miguel de Cervantes's masterpiece *Don Quixote*, with their varying degrees of faithfulness to the original, there exist numerous representations that share significant features of the novel's style of comedy: the focus on physically and morally contrasting characters, pervasive verbal humor, parody, irony, and intertextuality.<sup>1</sup> Such artistic expressions, though transformed into something radically new and often into an entirely different medium, are the latest manifestations of a paradigm that has the characters of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza at its center. The following analysis of the Cervantine duo and its disguised reentry into American popular culture, particularly in Abbott and Costello's movies and the television show *Seinfeld*, traces the many points these various episodes share, their family resemblances, to paraphrase Ludwig Wittgenstein.<sup>2</sup>

## Don Quixote's Literary and Folkloric Roots

In his seminal essay "Archetypal Criticism: A Theory of Myths," Northrop Frye notes in his description of the comedic mode that "[d]ramatic comedy, from which fictional comedy is mainly descended, has been remarkably tenacious of its structural principles and character types" (163). The plot structure of Greek New Comedy, as transmitted by Plautus and Terence, Frye asserts, has become the basis for most comedy, and its archetypal characters recur throughout European fiction, biblical narratives, and such modern forms of representation as vaudeville, comic strips, cinema, and television (163). Frye observes that *Tractatus Coislinianus* lists three types of comic characters in fiction: the *alazon*, a deceiving or self-deceived character, normally an object of ridicule in comedy or satire but often the hero of tragedy; the *eirone*, a self-deprecating or unobtrusively treated character to whom the audience is sympathetic and who usually is an agent of the happy ending in comedy and of the catastrophe in tragedy; and the *bomolochoi*, or buffoon (172). Frye also explains that Aristotle, in the *Ethics*, distinguishes between the first two and contrasts the buffoon, whose function is to increase the mood of festivity rather than to contribute to the plot, and a character he calls *agroikos*, the churlish or rustic. According to Frye, this fourth type may be extended to cover what in vaudeville was called the *straight man*, the solemn or inarticulate character who allows the humor to bounce off of him (175–76). More often, however, the churl belongs to the *alazon* group, the humorous blocking characters of comedy. Central to this group is the *senex iratus*, or heavy father, who, with his rages and threats, obsessions and gullibility, seems closely related to some of the demonic

characters of romance (Frye 172). Although the struggle of the hero with his enemy corresponds to the comic contest of *eiron* and *alazon* and forms the basis of comic action, the second opposed pair polarize the comic mood.<sup>3</sup> Frye's classically inspired schema of archetypal characters is applicable to Cervantes's novel, which incorporates the majority of the literary genres available in its day—pastoral, chivalric, picaresque, lyric, narrative, and dramatic—and includes adventures modeled on classical epic and Byzantine romance (Cascardi 40).

In addition, Cervantes's assimilation of the rich, medieval iconographic tradition behind the pairing of Don Quixote and the voluminous squire Sancho Panza is well documented.<sup>4</sup> The pair has been identified with the physiological and psychological oppositions of Carnival and Lent, as well as with the *Commedia dell'arte* buffoons, Ganassa and Bottarga, both well known to Cervantes and to the dramatists of the Spanish Golden Age.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the relationship of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza also incorporates their first cousins of the *comedia*, the *gracioso* (the jesting servant) and the *galán* (the leading man) as one of its basic models.<sup>6</sup> In a classic essay on the figure of the *gracioso* of Lope de Vega's theater, José F. Montesinos contrasts the character's features—his picaresque attachment to money, food, and self-preservation; merry and witty disposition; and indifference to exalted sentiment—with his master's uncompromising commitment to love, honor, and heroism, expressed in suitably lyric style (qtd in Close, *Cervantes* 339). Montesinos also notes the bond of loyalty

and affection, which despite this temperamental opposition, unites the *gracioso* to the *galán* (qtd. in Close, *Cervantes* 339).

The physical and moral oppositions between the carnivalesque squire and the Lenten knight errant constitute a prototype of innumerable comic pairs, most, if not all, of which are devoid of the intellectual and philosophical nuances that give depth to Cervantes's novel. In short, they lack the blending of lucidity with madness and the psychological finesse of the portrayal of the two characters. Though based on previously garnered archetypes, Cervantes's creations undeniably stand out in marked contrast to their precursors. Cervantes popularized them and defined their roles in a complex social and literary



Fig. 1. A. L. H. Telory's engraving *Don Quixote and Sancho Converse after Clavileño's Flight* (c. 1863).





Fig. 2. Abbott and Costello perform their “Who’s on First” routine in the film *The Naughty Nineties* (1945), as Sebastian Dinwiddle (Lou Costello), right, fails to understand the initial rules of the verbal game, as stated by Mr. Broadhurst (Bud Abbott). Photo courtesy of Photofest.

landscape. The Cervantine duo (see fig. 1) provides a comedic paradigm that has repeatedly—though often in disguised forms—reentered the cultural space from which it emerged: the stage. In the context of the United States, the model resurfaces in the post-Civil War variety theater circuit.

### Paradigmatic Pairs: From Vaudeville to the Screen

As early as the first decades of the nineteenth century burlesque minstrel shows and itinerant entertainment were being presented on North American soil. These forms of entertainment—modeled after the British music halls and the French *cabaret artistique*—flourished from the 1880s through the 1920s in

a network of urban theaters known as vaudeville.<sup>7</sup> Vaudeville stages brought together acts of every description, origin, and style, just as cities amassed more people of various backgrounds than ever before.<sup>8</sup> Among the comedy routines, the two-man “talking” or “double” act was usually the standout of the bill.<sup>9</sup> Often based on racial and ethnic stereotypes, these two-man acts used song, dance, and parody to propel the humor of their sketches. The team was composed of a straight man, also known as a *feeder* or a *stooge*, and the *funny man* or comic. While the straight man, generally well educated and endowed with an eloquent manner of speech, dressed in street clothes, the comic would wear funny, ill-fitted suits, and in puppet show-like movements, wildly exaggerate the

language and gestures of street folk, complete with their dialects and malapropisms.<sup>10</sup> The comedy produced was broad, physical, and rowdy. The two-man acts also featured compression, fast-paced and choreographed verbal exchanges, histrionic and simplified attitudes, free use of burlesque, the hoaxer’s ultimate triumph over the credulous dupe, and ritualized endings in cudgeling or in song and dance. This vaudeville act thus shares many of the formal features of the Spanish *entremés*, a genre in which Cervantes was the indisputable master.<sup>11</sup>

Though at times both vaudevillian characters were based on ethnic caricature, as in the “Dutch” act of Joe Weber and Lew Fields, the tall and aggressive straight man more often expressed the values espoused by elite WASPs.<sup>12</sup> He reinforced

the superiority of that group over Jewish, Irish, and Italian minorities, represented by the short, fat comic, who was the brunt of the jokes.<sup>13</sup> Though the relationship between the two was often violent, generally it was, like its Cervantine prototype, paternal—its characters were master and servant, father and child, for which the straight man also earned the nickname *scolder*. Often he would chide the comic for his childish transgressions, to which the comic, in turn, would respond, “I’m a bad boy.” This verbal exchange, which later became famous on screen as interpreted by Bud Abbott and Lou Costello, typifies the inherent immaturity of the comic character.

The popularity of vaudeville gradually declined with the advent of radio and silent films at the turn of the twentieth century. By the second decade of the new century, vaudeville performers such as Charlie Chaplin and the Marx Brothers were making the transition to radio and the big screen, lured away by greater salaries, less arduous working conditions, and the prospect of becoming international stars. When films changed from silents to the “talkies” of the late 1920s and early ’30s, vaudeville playwrights fled en masse to the West Coast to reproduce on film the success they had enjoyed on stage.<sup>14</sup> The comedic teams of the Three Stooges (Curly Howard, Larry Fine, and Moe Howard) and Abbott and Costello (Bud Abbott and Lou Costello), both of which entered in the industry’s waning years, used vaudeville to launch their radio and cinematic careers. Thus vaudeville, both in its methods and ruling aesthetic, did not simply perish; instead, like its Italian forefather *Commedia dell’arte*, it took on a new life, resounding in the succeeding media of film and radio.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, early silent cinema imports into its comic fiction many features of the vaudeville stage, not least of which are its character types and stock situations. The fat materialist/thin idealist paradigm, the patterns and effects of dialogue, the cross-fire talk of unconnected gags, and the pervasive verbal humor of the slapstick comedies of the 1930s and 1940s, such as Laurel and Hardy’s *Sons of the Desert* (1933) and Abbott and Costello’s *One Night in the*

*Tropics* (1940), are heirs of vaudeville’s carnivalesque and literary aesthetic.

### Quixotic Reminiscences in Abbott and Costello

In sharp contrast to the hard edge of some of vaudeville’s earlier acts, Abbott and Costello’s ethos, for lack of a better term, is light and ludic. Though often the hapless victims of diverse misfortunes, Costello’s characters are always figures of revelry and fun. Like Sancho

tantalized by an abundant feast but, like the mock governor of Barataria (798, pt. 2, ch. 47), is prohibited from enjoying the plentiful meal. In *In Society* (1944), Costello’s character inadvertently gets wrapped up in an aristocratic foxhunt, where the distinction between hunter and hunted is decidedly blurred. In a conceit reminiscent of its Cervantine precursor (721; pt. 2, ch. 34), the scene closes with Costello’s character running into a tree. In *Mexican Hayride* (1948), his

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Panza, they are imbued with the stock characteristics of the vaudevillian comic, particularly rustic diction, love of eating, and lack of courage. Consequently, they are the object of all manners of pranks, tricks, wiles, and witty deceptions. Further still, as it does for their Cervantine predecessor, such mocking often takes the ritualistic form of the crowning and uncrowning of the Carnival king.<sup>16</sup> In the film *In the Navy* (1941), Costello’s character is tossed in the air by means of a blanket held by sailors in a scene reminiscent of Sancho Panza’s ignominious blanket tossing outside of Juan Palomeque’s inn (135; pt. 1, ch. 17).<sup>17</sup> In *Pardon My Sarong* (1942), the duo is shipwrecked on an island in the South Seas where Costello’s character is falsely thought to be a god and, like Sancho on the mock island of Barataria, is forced into a series of adventures designed to test his knowledge and courage. For readers of *Don Quixote*, the outcome is all too familiar: the wise fool will prove himself worthy of his coronation and save the people of the island.<sup>18</sup> This theme reappears in *The Wistful Widow of Wagon Gap* (1947), a parody of the Wild West genre. Here Chester, Costello’s character, haphazardly becomes sheriff of a frontier town. In one scene he is

character accidentally becomes an honorary ambassador to Mexico, where he is paraded through the country and is waited on by women. Similarly, *Abbott and Costello Meet the Killer, Boris Karloff* (1949) finds his character elevated from bellhop to pampered hotel guest. Later in the same movie, he falls into a dark, subterranean cavern, from which, again like Sancho Panza (858, pt. 2, ch. 55), he is rescued from above. In *Abbott and Costello Go to Mars* (1953), Costello’s character is literally crowned king by female Venusians, the sole inhabitants of the planet, only to be relieved of his regal obligations at the end of the film.

Despite such shenanigans, the hoaxers and bystanders never exhibit any malicious glee. In this regard, the gentle merriment present within Abbott and Costello’s films is in marked contrast to the behavior of the courtesans in the Duke’s palace who, in *Don Quixote*, revel at the expense of the mad knight and the simple squire. Although Costello’s characters are subject to physical degradation (e.g., an egg to the face, an interminable ride on a bucking jackass, and all manner of pinches, slaps, pokes, and burns), his treatment is lighthearted, and in the end it results in no bodily harm.<sup>19</sup> Such pranks, though innocent, do establish him and his partner

as outsiders, at the margins of civilized society and, by extension, its capitalist economy.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the pair is often represented as fast-talking street peddlers trying to make do in the underground economy, a situation for which they are constantly harassed by those in positions of authority.

Abbott, as scolder, provides the verbal link to decorum, control, legality, and civilized society. He is, after all, endowed

holders of a given signifier refer it to the same code. In this case, the character Sebastian Dinwiddle, played by Costello, fails to understand the initial rules of the verbal game, as stated at the outset by Mr. Broadhurst (Abbott)—namely, that the St. Louis baseball team is composed of players with funny nicknames. This oversight by the simple-minded Dinwiddle leads to the creation of absurd homonyms and

characters played by Costello, a legacy unambiguously referenced in the episode “The Jacket” (2003). Taking exception to an insult from Jerry, George demands an explanation from his friend: “What are you, Bud Abbott? What are you calling me an idiot for?” George is endowed with all of the qualities of his predecessors. He is short, chubby, indolent, materialistic, pessimistic, faint hearted, paranoid, preoccupied with the scatological, and the eternal object of physical degradation. Though physically balding and bespectacled, George is a permanent adolescent who “determinedly devotes more time and effort to *avoiding* work than actually working” (Wyman 30, emphasis in original). A self-pitying failure, he traces his sexual insecurity and low self-esteem to his psychologically castrating parents. Indeed, his status as the loser of the group is reinforced in season five, when he is forced to move back in with his parents. This move situates him firmly in the archetype of the comic and emphasizes his status as a boy, rather than a grown man. George’s symbolic “crowning” occurs in the episode “The Opposite” (5021). Upon reaching the conclusion that all of his instincts are misguided, he resolves to act against them. Suddenly, he begins to experience good fortune: he has success with women, moves out of his parents’ house, and even lands a dream job. Inevitably, however, like all such raisings, it comes to an end: in the next episode, George’s social inadequacies return.

Much has been written about whether George, whose last name sounds Italian, is Jewish.<sup>25</sup> Jon Stratton argues that the character’s background really cannot be identified as Jewish-Italian, as he is certainly of Yiddish background rather than Sephardic, the background of the majority of Italian Jews (130).<sup>26</sup> Instead, George’s character is descended from Woody Allen’s neurotic, ethnic hyperbole. As Alexander has admitted: “If you go back and look at [George’s] early episodes, you’re seeing a guy do a really blatant Woody Allen imitation” (qtd. in Gattuso 8). Carla Johnson situates the show firmly in the tradition of Yiddish folklore, literature, and humor. She argues that George plays the ultimate *schlemiel* to Jerry’s *schlimazel* (116–24).<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Stratton argues that *Seinfeld* is a comedy about the

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with the knowledge and the language to interpret and explain the misguided behavior of his dim-witted partner. Unlike Don Quixote, he is not mad; he has the ability to communicate civilly and in the appropriate register, thereby resolving further conflict and circumventing tragic conclusions. The comedic team is of course restricted by the confines of the Hollywood romantic comedy, which, like its European models, stages intricately choreographed intrigues involving pairs of lovers and concludes merrily in dance, feasting, weddings, reconciliation, remission of punishment, and acknowledgment of error. In the case of Abbott and Costello, as in the interpolated stories of *Don Quixote*, such happy unions or reunions often are reached by virtue of the pair’s fortuitous intervention.<sup>21</sup> Social harmony is restored and the atmosphere of jocular gaiety is preserved.

Costello’s repeated failure to comprehend linguistic codes and norms of conversation is literally dramatized in the iconic “Who’s on First” routine (see fig. 2). The comic bit’s frequent occurrence in such films as *The Naughty Nineties* (1945), which contains the best-known rendition of the routine, emphasizes this inherent flaw. The dialogue, a classic variation of the vaudeville talking act, stages a breakdown in language’s capacity to produce meaning. As readers of *Don Quixote* know quite well, communication is possible only when the appre-

non sequiturs in two different codes. The spectator’s enjoyment of the effervescent dialogue that ensues depends not only on the disparity between the two planes, but also on the comprehension of both linguistic planes. In the end, Dinwiddle, like the 1615 Sancho Panza (pt. 1, ch. 44), finally grasps his counterpart’s code.<sup>22</sup>

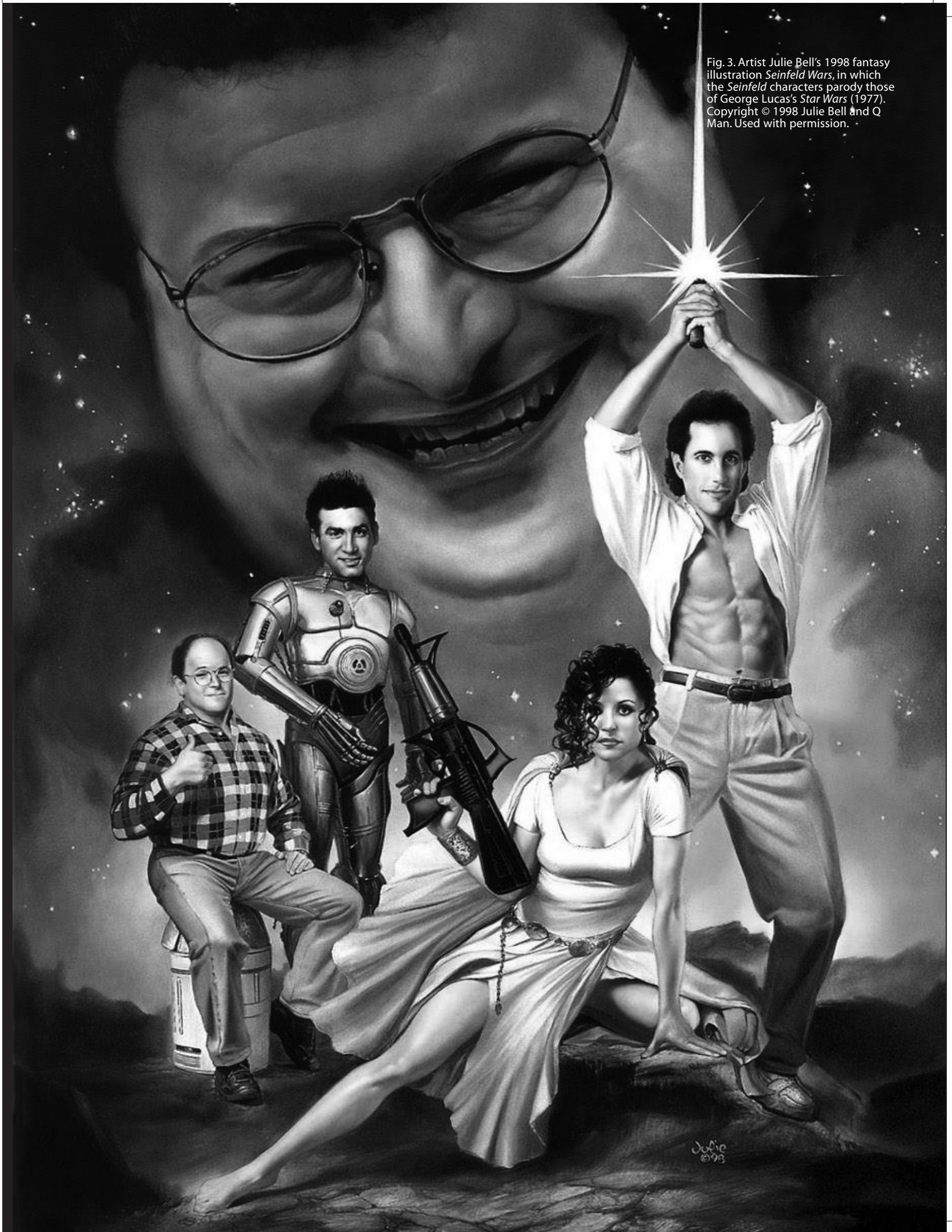
### What’s the Deal with Costanza?

The pairing of these comic character types flows naturally from cinema into television and, more specifically, into the situation comedy genre. The sitcom *Seinfeld* (1990–98), starring actor and comedian Jerry Seinfeld, is a case in point. A self-proclaimed “show about nothing,” *Seinfeld* draws on many traditional comic modalities such as stand-up, slapstick, sight gags, farce, satire, and physical comedy to propel its humor.<sup>23</sup> Further, its characters, events, and situations ground the show firmly in the tradition of paired physiological and psychological opposites. Seinfeld has claimed Abbott and Costello as one of his prime influences, and the series’ use of dialogue and language confirm this.<sup>24</sup> Some of the *Seinfeld* characters are variations of those we have seen before, and their functions within the paradigm change according to with whom they are paired.

George Costanza (Jason Alexander), whose character is cocreator Larry David’s alter ego, is the physiological and spiritual heir of both Sancho Panza and the many



Fig. 3. Artist Julie Bell's 1998 fantasy illustration *Seinfeld Wars*, in which the *Seinfeld* characters parody those of George Lucas's *Star Wars* (1977). Copyright © 1998 Julie Bell and Q Man. Used with permission.



Yiddish American's subaltern experience of modern, bourgeois civility:

A surprisingly large amount of the time of each episode of *Seinfeld* is taken up by George, Jerry, and Elaine discussing not what is proper and improper behavior, that is to say not etiquette, but what certain forms of behavior are, what they involve, and how to decipher what other people mean when they act in particular ways or say particular things. . . . In this way Jerry and George, and to a much lesser extent Elaine, behave like non-modern, indeed Yiddish, immigrants while at the same time appearing to be knowledgeable urbanites. (132)

While all four characters are in some way ambivalently Jewish, Stratton argues that George and Jerry behave as Americanized versions of Yiddish character types.<sup>28</sup> Yet both Stratton's and Johnson's Judeocentric interpretive models are far too reductive to properly account for the complexities and contradictions inherent in the character of George, as evidenced by their inability to properly explain how his Italian-sounding name can be accompanied by his Yiddish characterization. The fact remains that like Sancho Panza, Weber, and Costello before him, George Costanza, whose surname is simply created by combining those of his most emblematic predecessors (*Costello* + *Panza* = *Costanza*), is merely a more recent embodiment of the comic. As such, his membership within a specific ethnic group matters less than his overarching faithfulness to the trope.

Kramer (Michael Richards), the archetypical wacky neighbor, functions in the sitcom as a kind of postmodern hybridization of Ed Norton (Art Carney) from *The Honeymooners* (1955–56) and Jim Ignatowski (Christopher Lloyd) from *Taxi* (1978–83). Kramer fits the Cervantean paradigm: he is tall, thin, and eccentric, and, like his quixotic precursor, he is no stranger to assuming new personae and to some extent losing himself in the process. Indeed, in "The Switch" (6011), Kramer has an acute identity crisis, causing him to shun his true name. When the "K-Man" is finally forced to recognize his given name, his rationale for having concealed it up to this point echoes Alonso Quixano's condemnation of Don Quixote, when he recovers his sanity.<sup>29</sup> As Kramer explains, "All my life I've been running away from

that name. That's why I wouldn't tell anybody. But I've been thinking about it. All this time I'm trying not to be me. I'm afraid to face who I was. But I'm Cosmo, Jerry, I'm Cosmo Kramer, and that's who I'm going to be." His name is just one aspect of Kramer's mystery. Though frequently involved in some sort of hare-brained scheme or diversion, he appears to have no visible means of monetary support. Also, like his prototype Don Quixote, the majority of his zany adventures have repercussions for the integrity of his body.<sup>30</sup> His impromptu slides, falls, skids, and leaps across the threshold into Jerry's unlocked apartment<sup>31</sup> serve to underscore the anarchic Kramer's unconventional, boundary-breaking spirit.

Jerry's mild demeanor, for which he earns the nickname "Even Steven" in "The Opposite" (5021), creates a contrast with that of his two friends. As David Marc observes, his neutral balance in the order of things is emphasized by "his physical positioning between the tall, ectomorphic, manic Kramer and the short, endomorphic, monopolar George" (26). Often he is depicted as the passive, central player who merely observes the chaos around him. Yet when he is paired with the physically, morally, and socially inferior George, Jerry's function is more akin to the vaudevillian straight man whose jokes are at the expense of the comic. For Marc, it is Jerry's superior social flexibility that allows him to be more successful than George (25). As the heroic title character of the show, it is no surprise that Jerry's primary role model is Superman.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the *Superman* comics function as one of *Seinfeld*'s primary textual references, with Jerry always implicitly depicted in the guise of the Man of Steel.<sup>33</sup> When George is placed into such a relation, it is always mockingly ironic, as when Jerry calls George "Aquaboy" in "The Glasses" (5003). That Jerry calls his friend by the adolescent version of DC Comics superhero Aquaman signals George's immaturity and reinforces his vaudevillian status as the comic.

Artist Julie Bell's 1998 fantasy illustration *Seinfeld Wars* (see fig. 3), in which the *Seinfeld* characters parody those of George Lucas's *Star Wars* (1977), further supports such associations. Jerry is depicted as the valiant Jedi Knight, Luke Sky-

walker; George as the squat droid squire, R2-D2, who accompanies him on his heroic attempts to defeat the Evil Empire; Kramer as the tall and slender C-3PO, the hyper-intellectual and loquacious droid who, reminiscent of the bodily injury repeatedly received by Don Quixote, is constantly being dismembered; Elaine Benes (Julia Louis-Dreyfus) as Princess Leia; and Newman (Wayne Knight) as the "Dark Side" defender of the Force, Darth Vader. In *Star Wars*, R2-D2's stream of digital chirps and whistles is a *reductio ad absurdum* of Sancho and the vaudevillian comic's simple speech, while C-3PO's metallic body and disjointed movements are reminiscent of the medieval knight dressed in a suit of armor.<sup>34</sup> Curiously, the shapes and features of these interplanetary droids are strikingly similar to Salvador Dalí's circa 1963 etching of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza.<sup>35</sup>

In *Seinfeld*, postmodern pastiche and parody brought the Cervantine comedy duo paradigm into the 1990s sitcom. Though Cervantes's themes, motifs, and types are distorted as they are adapted to new cultural contexts, they are simultaneously affirmed. The television characters George and Kramer betray their literary, quixotic origins, while the teaming of George and Jerry is self-consciously modeled on vaudeville, Abbott and Costello, and others. To overlook earlier generations of this lineage and the centrality of *Don Quixote* to such comedy can result in a failure on the part of criticism to explain many of the inconsistencies in its latest manifestations. Archetypal criticism, however, is able to account for George's marginality without resorting to speculation about his heritage. In this instance, such an approach is capable of explaining seeming contradictions in his character's constitution, where other interpretive frameworks, such as the ethnocentric approach, fall short.

## NOTES

1. For the purposes of this study, *Don Quixote* is posited as a risible book, a work of humor, a status afforded it by its contemporary readers and by critics in the so-called "hard school" of twentieth-century Quixote criticism, which insists that the novel is primarily a "funny book," with little or no contestatory pretensions. Oscar Mandel



(154–55) explains that “soft school” critics regard Don Quixote as the admirable hero of the novel and the world he inhabits as the “villain” or, at any rate, the object of Cervantes’s satire; “hard school” readers see Don Quixote, in spite of his nobility, as a ridiculous figure. The debate is encapsulated in the title of John J. Allen’s book *Don Quixote: Hero or Fool? A Study in Narrative Technique*. See Mancing (122–25) for a concise survey of the two camps. On *Don Quixote* as a funny book, see Close, *Cervantes*; and Russell.

2. The visually suggestive qualities of *Don Quixote* have inspired a copious tradition of iconography since the novel’s publication in 1605: paintings, woodcuts, engravings, etchings, drawings, lithographs, and, most notably, illustrations for printed editions. The celebration of the *Quixote* centenary in 2005 has brought renewed attention to such representations. See, for example, the images collected in the electronic database and digital archive sponsored by the Cervantes Project and Texas A&M University.

3. Aristotle bases his meditation on drama on a series of interrelated dichotomies: tragedy/comedy, royal/plebeian, noble/ugly, grave/frivolous, and witty/foolish. Indeed, the conception of the comic exists always in a simultaneous relation of parasitic intimacy with, and symmetrical opposition to, the noncomic (Close, *Cervantes* 187). This idea also points to the “pleasure” of comedy as Sigmund Freud describes it in his analysis of wit, jokes, and dreams; a pleasure that has to do with temporarily suspending the “rules” of adulthood and returning, albeit symbolically, to an earlier pre-Oedipal state (8: 236). In this sense, the realm of comedy is similar to the traditional realms of carnival and festivity, time periods when the rules and regulations of a society are briefly suspended (Close, *Cervantes* 5). For Mikhail Bakhtin, the opposition between the comic and noncomic is reducible to forms familiar to all periods and cultures. It consists in a systematic, pointed mirroring and inversion of the superior by the inferior (Close, *Cervantes* 188). On the one hand is the heroic body of values promulgated by the ruling class; on the other is the coarse rebelliousness and sensuous gratifications of the grotesque body, with its language and festivals as an outlet for the world-upside-down, a subversive revelry of the common people (Close, *Cervantes* 188). For an extensive and detailed interdisciplinary analysis of the comic and its theories from Aristotle to the present, see Dziemidok. See Orlando on Freud and jokes as a model for literature.

4. On the folkloric and literary tradition behind the characterization and pairing of the mad knight and the rustic squire, see Hendrix; Márquez Villanueva; Chevalier; Molho; and Redondo’s studies.

5. On the character of Ganassa, see Joly.

6. Frye elaborates: “Another central *eiron* figure is the type entrusted with hatching the schemes which bring about the hero’s victory. This character in Roman comedy is almost always a tricky slave (*dolosus servus*), and in Renaissance comedy he becomes the scheming valet who is so frequent in Continental plays, and in Spanish drama is called the *gracioso*” (173). Renaissance comedy, unlike Roman comedy, had a great variety of characters that were the structural equivalent of the *bomolochoi*: professional fools, clowns, pages, singers, and incidental characters with established comic habits like malapropism or foreign accents (Frye 175).

7. For a history of this American art form, see Sobel; and Stein. See Oberdeck for a cultural history of the time period when vaudeville was popular.

8. The scope of the presentations was unique in the history of American live performance: vaudeville shows included drama, music, comedy, feats of athleticism, magic, animal acts, and lectures by celebrities and intellectuals.

9. For an extensive online collection of theater and vaudeville playbills, programs, scripts, recordings, and film clips, see “American Variety Stage.”

10. This paradigm also enters the American comic strip genre in Bud Fisher’s (Harry Conway Fisher) *A. Mutt*, later renamed *Mutt and Jeff*, which is generally regarded as the world’s first daily comic strip. It ran from 1907 to 1982, appearing first in the *San Francisco Chronicle* and then in the *San Francisco Examiner* before being syndicated.

11. On Cervantes and the dramatic interlude of the *entremés*, see Casaldueño; and Asensio.

12. In the late 1880s and ’90s, comedians Joe Weber and Lew Fields formed one of the most popular comedy acts—Mike and Meyer—of the vaudeville stage. They developed a series of ethnic routines wherein Weber played the short, rotund Mike, and Fields played the tall and lean Meyer, a bully who constantly schemed to swindle Mike out of his money. This cartoonish portrayal of German immigrants became vaudeville’s definitive “Dutch” act (a corruption of *Deutsch*). There was nothing subtle about the act of Weber and Fields. They wore garish clothes and porkpie hats, used false chin beards, and spoke fractured English in outrageous German accents. Their dialogue relied on silly misunderstandings and knockabout battles with punches, kicks, and pratfalls. The team inspired numerous imitators in vaudeville and beyond. Their formula was copied by Gus and Max Rogers, who played characters similar to Mike and Meyer in a series of eight Broadway musicals between 1899 and 1908. Weber and Fields expanded their act into a series of full-length musical burlesques and produced musical comedy extravaganzas, costarring some of the greatest stars of the day. *Whirl-i-gig* (1899), *Hoity-Toity* (1901), and *Hokey-Pokey* (1912) combined the

usual Weber and Fields silliness and physical comedy with lavish production values. They appeared as themselves in several film musicals, including *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle* (1939) and *Lillian Russell* (1940). For more on this comedy team, see Fields and Fields. See also Wittke (225–26), for an outline of the duo’s biographies and careers and a wonderful description of their typical act.

13. Charlie Chaplin’s iconic clown image of the “Little Tramp” in the silent classic *The Immigrant* (1917) is a case in point. Here *Commedia dell’arte*’s figure of the harlequin weds seamlessly with one of vaudeville’s classic themes to express the trials and tribulations of the misunderstood immigrant class. For a discussion of the the early American variety circuit’s stereotypical characterization of the immigrant for purposes of comic relief and dramatic entertainment, see Wittke.

14. See Robert C. Allen for the interdependence of film and vaudeville. See also Green and Laurie, which includes television.

15. Richard Koszarski’s study of silent film and Scott Eyman’s analysis of the “talkie” revolution frame the artistic period in question.

16. James Iffland argues that the popular tradition of Carnival, in the Bakhtinian sense, is the principal source of Cervantine humor.

17. Blanket tossing is a common activity of Carnival. All references to *Don Quixote* are from John Rutherford’s translation.

18. On the literary and folkloric tradition of the wise fool, particularly as it pertains to the character of Sancho Panza, see Close, “Sancho Panza.”

19. *Ride ‘Em Cowboy* (1942) is the exception to the rule. Here, Costello’s character is forced into a swimming pool by snobbish country club members who ignore his inability to swim. It is, perhaps, the only moment in Abbott and Costello’s body of work where the audience actually might pity the ridiculous character.

20. In the film *In Society* (1944), the duo’s insolvent plumbing business is called on to fix a leaky sink in a tycoon’s mansion. Here, the carnivalesque is suggested by the juxtaposition of capitalism’s polar opposites—the plumber and the billionaire—and made explicit as the industrialist’s wife is simultaneously hosting a high-society costume ball downstairs.

21. Roberto González Echevarría finds the essence of the “Cervantine” in “the ease, the elegance and apparent effortlessness, with which the intertwined and complicated stories, happening in different levels of the fiction, resolve themselves” simultaneously (xx-xxi). On this narrative technique in Cervantes, see El Saffar.

22. The reference is, of course, to the heated debate regarding the “true” nature of the barber’s basin/Mambrino’s helmet. Sancho attempts to resolve the argument by partially fusing the chivalric and prosaic



codes into one happy humorous linguistic invention: *baciyelmo*, the “basin-helmet.”

23. Elke Van Cassel succinctly summarizes *Seinfeld*'s comic ethos: “There are jokes about social etiquette, political correctness, and the awkward and embarrassing situations the characters get themselves into. There are also funny comments about trivialities and the stuff of everyday life, witticisms about social relationships and dating, sarcasm and self-mockery. In addition, there are jokes that are funny because they are recurrent—‘Hello, Newman . . .’; references to current events and pop culture; taboo-breaking comedy (“The Contest,” 4011) for example; underlying layers of satire and social criticism; and finally, one-liners, word jokes, and puns” (180). For Albert Auster, *Seinfeld* continues a tradition inherent in *Mary Tyler Moore* (1970–77), *M\*A\*S\*H* (1972–83), and *Cheers* (1982–93): the sitcom as an authentic American comedy of manners (22). For Dennis Hall, *Seinfeld* is a comedy of humors and manners, in many respects following the examples of Ben Jonson, Oliver Goldsmith, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan (73). David P. Pierson also situates the show within this tradition and emphasizes *Seinfeld*'s critical observations of social manners and the dramatic interpretation of civility.

24. Much of the physical and verbal comedy of *Seinfeld* echoes the comedy team of Abbott and Costello and, to a lesser degree, Laurel and Hardy. *Seinfeld*'s indebtedness to the work of Abbott and Costello is also well documented, particularly in the film *Abbott and Costello Meet Jerry Seinfeld* (1994). Laurel and Hardy is explicitly alluded to in the episode titled “The Chaperone” (6001) when Jerry says to George: “Good night Ollie,” and his friend replies, “Good night Stan.” The numbers of *Seinfeld* episodes are given in the “*Seinfeld* Episode and Situation Guide.” The first number of the series corresponds to the season; the second number, separated by a zero, corresponds to the episode number in that season. Thus “2003” corresponds to season 2, episode 3.

25. See, for example, Lynn M. Cohn's and Rosalin Krieger's articles on the representation of Jewishness in *Seinfeld*. Vincent Brook's studies place the show within the subgenre of the “Jewish” sitcom.

26. Stratton argues that in American thinking Jews and Italians are similarly positioned: both have been perceived as “not-quite-white while being granted the social status of white” (130).

27. Says Stratton, “Of all the Yiddish character-types it is these two that have flourished in the American cultural context” (127). In *The Schlemiel as Modern Hero*, Ruth Wisse argues that the character of the *schlemiel* evolved out of the medieval European fool. Wisse explains that “[t]he schlemiel is the active disseminator of bad luck, and the schlimazel its passive victim” (14).

28. According to Stratton, Jerry's nemesis, Newman, a manipulative and treach-

erous neighbor whose name evokes Aryanism, represents the dominant culture. He is threatening and aggressive, and, as a postal worker, he represents the state. In “The Lip Reader” (5006), Newman declares ominously, “When you control the mail, you control information.” In this regard, his function as a blocking character is akin to that of the priest and the barber in *Don Quixote*.

29. Quixote declares: “I was mad, and now I am sane: I was Don Quixote de La Mancha and now, as I said, I am Alonso Quixano the Good” (979; pt. 2, ch. 74).

30. Kramer's physical comedy is joyfully reminiscent of such silent clowns as Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin or the Three Stooges, Lucille Ball, and others (McWilliams 78). With his various unannounced, explosive entries into Jerry's apartment, Kramer is the most consistent source of sight gags on the show.

31. David Marc writes that the unlocked door of the inner-city apartment has somehow endured from *The Honeymooners* to *Seinfeld* as a theatrical convention that defies all rationalizations of verisimilitude (26).

32. Superman is mentioned in many episodes of *Seinfeld*, either by name or in pictures. On intertextuality and *Seinfeld*, see Dunne. For a partial list of allusions, to both high and low culture, see “*Seinfeld* Intertexts and Allusions.”

33. The manipulative, aggressive, and utterly self-interested character Newman functions as the series's primary blocking character. He is the opposite of Jerry in nearly every respect: overweight, slovenly, conniving, boastful, and malicious. He is Jerry's nemesis, his Lex Luther. Interestingly, Frye notes that the principle of repetition as the basis of humor is a defining characteristic of the comic strip genre, “in which a character is established as a parasite, a glutton (often confined to one dish), or a shrew, and who begins to be funny after the point has been made every day for several months” (168). Such a principle may be at work in the recurrent joke at the expense of Jerry's comic book–like nemesis: “Hello, Newman . . .”

34. The web of associations extends itself further in *R2-D2: Beneath the Dome* (2002), a mockumentary that tells the never-before-told life story of the *Star Wars* character. It suggests that the robot has spent some of his time between films on stage, depicting Sancho Panza in *Man of La Mancha*.

35. George Lucas has acknowledged his debt to many of the archetypal characters and narratives outlined by Joseph Campbell. In the featurette *The Characters of Star Wars* (2004), the creator of the sci-fi saga describes how the characters C-3PO and R2-D2 were modeled on the two peasant protagonists of Akira Kurosawa's film *The Hidden Fortress* (1958), as well as on the robot Maria in the science fiction classic *Metropolis* (1927), directed by Fritz Lang.

Here, Lucas also affirms that he envisioned the droid duo as a kind of comic relief in the tradition of Mutt and Jeff, Laurel and Hardy, and Abbott and Costello.

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